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Editorials

As Intelligence, It's Not Very Smart

IT'S TIME somebody in Washington either prescribes "smart pills" for Admiral Stansfield Turner, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, or President Carter replaces him.

The CIA and Turner himself have objected mightily and with reason to the disclosure of the names of overseas intelligence agents by disaffected former employees of the agency.

But Turner has done something worse in exposing every U.S. journalist abroad to the suspicion he or she is working for the CIA rather than, or in addition to, the print or broadcast medium to which accredited.

That's not only unfair to thousands of working news people, it's also not smart from the standpoint of intelligence operations.

Turner last week told the American Society of Newspaper Editors he had personally approved the use of journalists for secret intelligence operations on three separate instances. He added that in none of those cases were the journalists actually used, but refused to say anything more on the specifics.

Moreover, he said, he would not bar a CIA agent from using a journalist's cover if the occasion demanded it, such as in a terrorist situation.

Turner's action in the three cases was in accord with a permitted exception to the CIA's November, 1977, regulations which barred the use of U.S. journalists as agents. (Regula-



CIA'S TURNER
Jeopardizes Journalists

tions under his predecessor, George Bush, forbade relationship with any full-time or part-time accredited U.S. journalist.) The exception is that it could be done with the director's approval. Actually, the three cases did not involve full-time working journalists; two were part-timers and the third a non-journalistic employee of a news agency.

The very reason the CIA says journalists are valuable is why there should be no hint of their possible use in intelligence work: They can move around freely and ask questions without arousing suspicion and they usually have good sources of information within foreign governments.

It is a fact of life that people — and officials — of many nations of the world regard the CIA as the most sinister of all U.S. organizations. The idea that any journalist may be working secondarily for the CIA or be a CIA agent under cover can bring restrictions of the freedom of movement of all journalists and close their sources.

It can also, in a situation like that in Iran now, endanger a journalist's life.

Beyond its disservice to journalism, Turner's position may do the intelligence effort more harm than good. In many cases journalists moving about freely and employing their confidential sources develop information which is provided openly through their print or broadcast media but is valuable to the CIA and otherwise would not have been available to the agency. The total value — from an intelligence standpoint — of that information probably far exceeds what can be gained in a few isolated instances of journalists working for the CIA or agents posing as journalists.

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